

Metropolitan Cooperative Library System: Public Perception of Public Libraries

RESEARCH REPORT SEPTEMBER, 1999

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RESEARCH REPORT

Metropolitan Cooperative Library System: Public Perception of Public Libraries

Project Background

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The CLA/CSL Library Awareness Task Force, and the Metropolitan Cooperative Library System has requested that market research be conducted:

To assess public perceptions in California regarding

Internet”¹

2.

3.

library awareness campaign.

Libraries and library associations across the country have been

professionals, particularly with a view to working within the new information age that is evolving due to technology and the impact

been organized, using in part the results of previous research to guide discussions of how libraries must evolve with technology in

It is not only public libraries that are redefining themselves – a recent study conducted by the Intelligence Unit research project found that 92% of the top world business leaders sampled said “the Internet will reshape the world

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marketplace by 2001”².

MetaResearch was selected to conduct the market research assessing the general California public’s perceptions of public libraries, library staff, and their views on the future role of public libraries. The research was also designed to provide useful information for a public relations firm to develop a statewide library awareness campaign for California.

RESEARCH METHOD

To meet the objectives of the RFP, both qualitative and quantitative research was conducted. The qualitative component used focus group methodology. The groups were used to investigate reasons for using or not using libraries and library services, the future of libraries, the impact of the Internet, and discuss ideas for a public relations campaign.

A total of 5 focus groups with library users and non-users combined were conducted: two English-language groups on Tuesday, August 10, 1999, in Sacramento at MetaResearch, two English-language groups on Thursday, August 12, 1999, conducted in Redwood City at Tragon Corp., and one Spanish-language group conducted August 18, 1999, in Los Angeles at LA Focus.

The quantitative research was designed to obtain up-to-date attitudes from the general public, and also to compare answers to a few specific questions that had been asked in the past to see if

² “The survey findings paint a completely different picture of business in the new millennium. As companies transform to remain competitive in the Digital Age, they will adopt a new business model, putting aside the one that has been in place since the Industrial Age began two hundred years ago. “ - Competing in the Digital Age: Will the Internet Change Corporate Strategy? May 1999, Booz Allen & Hamilton.

attitudes had changed over time³. Although the populations were different, it was nevertheless felt that previous research results could provide at least a minimum basis for comparison.

MetaResearch conducted stratified RDD (random digit dialed) telephone surveys with a random sample of California residents, proportionally representative of the population at a state-wide level⁴. A questionnaire was designed to quantitatively assess overall impressions of public libraries and their staff, evaluation of specific services, the perceived impact of the Internet, comparisons with bookstores, and thoughts about the future. The questionnaire was translated into Spanish and approximately 6% of the interviews were conducted in Spanish with bilingual interviewers. One thousand and seventeen interviews (1,017) were completed; and the affiliated sampling error was +/- 3.1% (at the 95% confidence level, at its most conservative).

Interviewing took place July 23 – August 5, 1999. The average interview length was approximately 13.3 minutes.

Caveat

The sole purpose of this report is to provide a collection, categorization and summarization of public opinion data. Meta intends to neither endorse nor criticize the Metropolitan Cooperative Library System, the California Library Association, or

³ In particular, the two studies we wanted comparisons with included one conducted nationally in 1996 with a stratified sample of 1,015 U.S. residents (“Public Opinion Survey on the Future of Libraries in the Digital Age”, prepared by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, April 1996. In Buildings, books, and bytes. Libraries and communities in the digital age, Benton Foundation, November 1996. <http://www.benton.org/Library/Kellogg/appendix.html>), and the second with a sample of 1,200 registered voters in California which was conducted 1994 (“California Library Services Study”, Binder Poll, May, 1994.)

⁴ Quotas were established for five geographic areas, based on U.S. Census Bureau estimates. Approximately 28% of interviews were completed with LA County residents; 20% with Coastal Southern California residents; 18% with San Francisco Bay Area residents; 15% with Central Valley residents; and 18% with residents in the Balance of California.

the California State Library their policies, products, or staff. The
revisions, or further disclosure/distribution of this report.

Results and Conclusions

the quantitative and qualitative (focus group) components. (The complete focus group summary report is contained in the results
with open-ended comments from the survey when applicable. The key contrasts with the results of the previous studies are also
univariate and multivariate statistical analyses. Further information
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crosstabulations included in the results binder. Comments and
quantitative findings when appropriate, and expanding on certain
emphasized, however, that there is no direct correspondence
the two methods of gathering information differed.

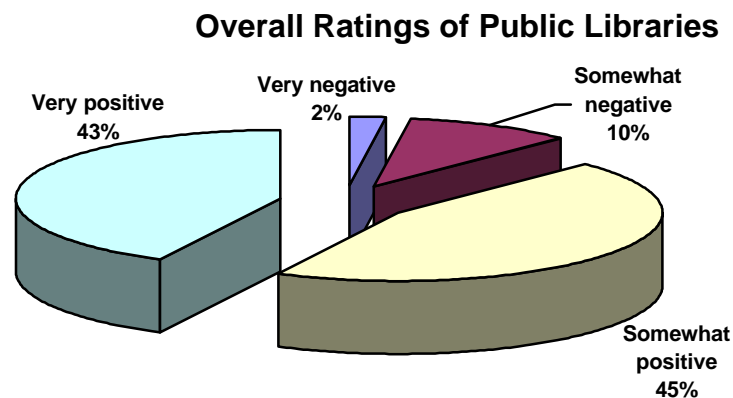
-
- 1** ➤ The vast majority (88%) of respondents had positive impressions
reason for this positive impression had to do with library staff.*

Two sets of frequency tables are included in the binders. In one set, the undecided/don't know responses

Respondents were asked to give their general impression of public libraries in their area, using a 4-point rating scale that ranged from “very negative” to “very positive”. Nearly nine-in-ten respondents held positive opinions: results indicated that 43%⁶ of those interviewed said they had a “very positive” impression of the public libraries in their area, and a further 45% said their impressions were “somewhat positive.”

Taking the sampling margin of error into account, this means that had we interviewed all California residents, we could expect (with 95% confidence) that the actual percentage of residents having a positive impression would lie somewhere between 86% and 90%.

Only 2% of respondents held “very negative” impressions of public libraries and an additional 10% had “somewhat negative” impressions. Results are presented graphically in the pie chart below:



When asked to explain their impressions, of those who were “very positive”, the most frequently given reason was because of positive experiences with the staff in general. A few of the comments included:

- ♦ “You can ask them anything and they’re very good.”
- ♦ “People that work in the library are very conscientious. Doing a good job. They’re not getting paid enough.”

⁶ Unless otherwise specified, the percentages cited in this report exclude responses of “Undecided/Don’t know.” This was generally not presented as an answer category. It is common in multivariate analyses to exclude the undecideds and also to collapse response categories, depending on the distribution of responses. Results found in the frequency questionnaire (in a separate section in the results binder) include the Undecided/Don’t know responses and so may not correspond exactly to the frequencies reported here.

- ♦ “Whenever I’ve been there the staff has been real helpful.”
- ♦ “The librarians are always friendly. They are always willing to help me with anything.”
- ♦ “Very professional workers.”
- ♦ “Because they were always nice to me, I never had any problems. The customer service was always great.”
- ♦ “Staff very courteous and cooperative and the books are available.”
- ♦ “They’re all friendly and helpful and have a good attitude.”
- ♦ “I think the main reason is the personnel and the material - they’ve got a lot of resource material.”

The second most frequently given reason for a very positive impression was that the library had up-to-date information/equipment/programs:

- ♦ “I was able to get information from a computer in my town library.”
- ♦ “It is all up-to-date and they were helpful.”
- ♦ “They have very good service. You can renew books by phone. They have a large selection of books including the latest published.”
- ♦ “Just the selection and they have the magazines and journals that I read in stock. It is never crowded; there is a lot of space.”

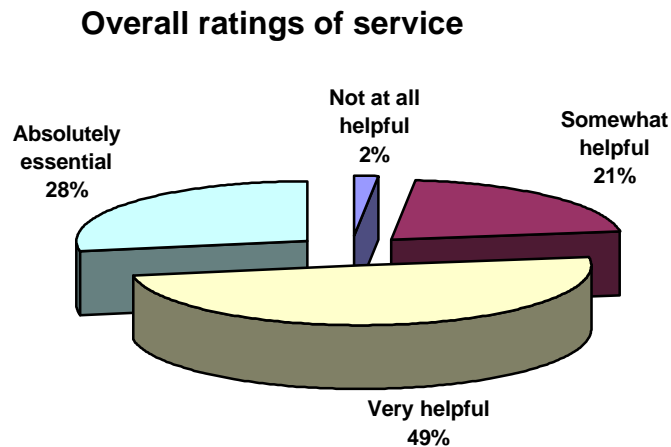
It was interesting to note that not having up-to-date information was the most frequently-occurring explanation for negative impressions:

- ♦ “The lack of updated materials and a small selection of what they do have.”
- ♦ “They are kind of out of date and old fashioned.”
- ♦ “It doesn’t have as many books. It needs a broader range of books and more access to the value lines for researching stock.”

- 2 ➤ *The majority of respondents (77%) rated the overall service provided by librarians and library staff as either “very helpful” or “absolutely essential.”*

Only 2% of respondents rated the overall service that is provided by librarians and library staff in public libraries as “not at all helpful.” Twenty-one percent rated librarians and library staff as “somewhat helpful.” The remaining 77% were divided among responses of “very helpful” (49%) or “absolutely essential” (28%). It is an indication of the positive role libraries play in California residents’ lives that nearly a third of them felt the service provided by librarians and library staff was so essential. Results are presented

graphically below:



The 2% of residents who said the service was not helpful were asked if they could explain further. There was no one common

- ♦ there aren't many people to help you find the book you want."
- ♦ "I have MS and I can't do the things I really want."
- ♦ "Not so much with the adults but what I see towards the junior high and high school kids by the way they treat them when they
- ♦ Shhh.
They're on you like cats."

➤ *The most "important"*

libraries were the service provided by library staff education
of children quality of life.

overall impression of public libraries, a technique was used which ranked various aspects according to how they related to overall
⁷ having to do with the

whether libraries should spend more to provide access to computer databases, how essential they are to the quality of life in the

need for libraries) and attitudes towards being taxed were entered into multiple regression analyses, along with demographic

librarians and library staff.

⁷ Questions 130 a through e.

Results of these analyses indicated that the most important contributors to overall impressions of public libraries were: the overall service that is provided by librarians and library staff, the statement that libraries play an essential role in the education of our children, and the statement that libraries are essential to the quality of life in my community. In other words, respondents who were more positive in their overall impressions of public libraries were more likely to give positive evaluations of library service and staff, and agree that libraries play an essential role in the education of children and are essential to the quality of life in their community. Similarly, respondents who gave negative impressions of public libraries also tended to give negative evaluations of these aspects.

USE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Access

- 4 ➤ *Approximately three-in-four residents accessed a public library during the past year. The median number of visits among users was 6 times during the year.*

Respondents were asked how many times they had used or accessed a public library during the past 12 months. Answers ranged from none (0) to 96 times. Approximately 76% of respondents had accessed a public library at least once, and 24% said they had not accessed a public library. When the non-users were removed from the calculation, results indicated that the median⁸ number of times users accessed the library was 6; and the average⁹ number of times was approximately once a month (13 times a year).

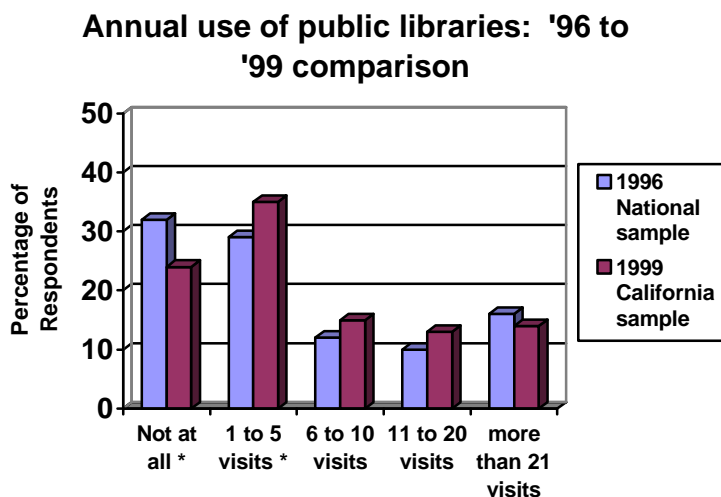
- 5 ➤ *Personal use of public libraries appears to have increased from 1996 (on a national level) to the present (on a state-wide California level)¹⁰.*

⁸ The median is the value above and below which half the cases fall, the 50th percentile.

⁹ The average or mean is given here for some readers' benefit, but it is not the measure of central tendency that best suits these data due to the wide range of answers. The median is the more meaningful statistic in this instance.

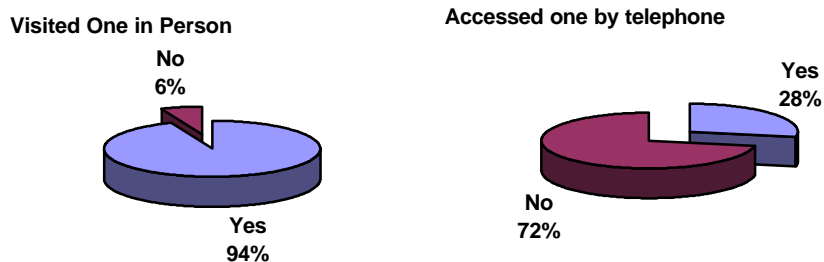
¹⁰ The caveat to this conclusion is that the reader should be aware that the two populations surveyed were different, although the wording of the question was similar. The 1996 study ("Public Opinion Survey on the Future of Libraries in the Digital Age", prepared by Lake Research and the Tarrance Group, April 1996) was conducted on a national sample of 1,015 US residents and the current study was of California residents only.

Results were re-coded using the categories that were used in the 1996 national survey¹¹. Tests of proportions conducted on the results indicated that there were significantly more public library users in the current 1999 California study (76%) than in the 1996 national study (68%). (An alternative way of wording this is to say that there were significantly fewer non-users this year (24%) than three years ago (32%)). Significantly different response categories are indicated with an asterisk (*) in the graph below which summarizes comparisons within each response category:



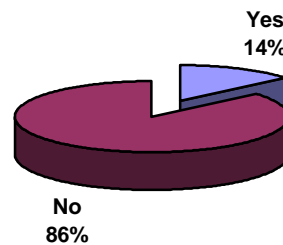
6 ➤ Accessing the library via the Internet does not occur frequently.

The vast majority of users went in person to the library (94%). Approximately 28% also accessed one by telephone, but only 14% said they had used or accessed a public library via the Internet during the last year. Results are presented graphically below:



¹¹ We could not compare results from the 1994 California study as the wording was different – it asked how many times all members of the household visited the library in the past 12 months. The wording in both the 1996 national study and the current study asked respondents how many times they personally had used or accessed a public library. Usage results from 1994 were therefore obviously higher and cannot be directly compared.

Accessed one online, via the Internet



Survey Results. Reasons for Not Using: Non-User and User Explanations

- 7 ➤ The two main explanations given by non-users for not using a public library were that they had no reason to and that they were too busy.

The most frequently given reasons by non-users for not using the library in the last twelve months are presented in the table below, along with the percentages from the 1994 California study¹². With the exception of getting information elsewhere, results are quite similar.

| <i>Reasons for Non-Use</i> | <i>Percent of Non-Users Responding: 1999</i> | <i>Percent of Non-Users Responding: 1994</i> |
|--|--|--|
| <i>1. Have no reason to/Do not use libraries</i> | 28% | 25% |
| <i>2. Too busy</i> | 15% | 16% |
| <i>3. Prefer to buy my books/personal library</i> | 9% | N/A |
| <i>4. Get my information online/via Internet (1999 classification)</i> | 9% | N/A |
| <i>4. Get my information elsewhere (1994 classification)</i> | 3% | 28% |

Some of the comments from the 1999 survey included:

- ♦ “I just don’t go. I don’t have time.”
- ♦ “I just really haven’t had the need to.”
- ♦ “I haven’t really needed to go. It’s been reasonable when I have gone in the past.”
- ♦ “I buy books, I am just too lazy to go and take them back.”

- 8 ➤ Users felt that they had no reason to access the library more frequently and that they were too busy. In addition, approximately one-in-ten mentioned that the hours were inconvenient.

The most frequently-occurring reasons by users for not using the library more often in the last twelve months are presented in the table below¹³.

| <i>Reasons for Not Using the Library More Often</i> | <i>Percent of Users Responding (1999)</i> |
|--|---|
| <i>1. Have no reason to/Already use frequently</i> | 30% |
| <i>2. Too busy</i> | 16% |
| <i>3. Inconvenient hours</i> | 10% |
| <i>4. Get my information online/via the Internet</i> | 6% |

Some of the user comments included:

- ♦ “No need, I do research on stocks, once every couple of months, find news articles for work, take my son to get books.”
- ♦ “There isn’t any reason.”
- ♦ “The hours. Hours are restricted. You don’t have a full 8 hours you have 4 I think.”
- ♦ “Too busy taking care of my kids.”
- ♦ “Well I have probably gone in there once a week. I think I go far more than the average person.”

- 9 ➤ The “threat” of the Internet in terms of people not using public libraries, or using them less frequently because of the Internet is not great at this particular point in time.

It can be seen from the tables above that obtaining information via the Internet instead of going to the library does not yet appear to be a major explanation for either users or non-users: 10% of non-users cited the Internet as a reason for not using the library and only 6% of users said it was why they didn’t go to the library more often. The extent to which this will increase in the future is up for speculation.

¹² Percentage results include don’t know responses.

¹³ Percentage results include don’t know responses.

Focus Group Results. Reasons for Not Using: Non-User Explanations

- 10 ➤ *The explanations given by non-users during the focus groups generally supported the quantitative survey results, but also offered more detail and in some cases, other explanations.*

Focus group participants who were non-users were asked why they did not use the public library and where they got their information. One explanation that was mentioned in two focus groups (Sacramento - 18-25 year olds; and Redwood City - 13-17 year olds) was that the school library was used instead:

- ♦ "I use the school library, it's more convenient."
- ♦ Use the school library, "has everything I need."
- ♦ "The school library is closer."

In the Los Angeles Spanish focus group the reasons for not going to the library included:

- ♦ having no or only very young children
- ♦ working late into the evening hours
- ♦ getting information from radio and television
- ♦ lack of proximity to a library
- ♦ overdue charges, and
- ♦ prior bad experiences (e.g., an Hispanic library worker who refused to speak Spanish)

Those who did not use the public library in the Redwood City 18-65 year old group said it was due to inconvenient hours, the library was not up-to-date, and they were too busy or had no reason to go.

Other explanations in the 18-25 year old Sacramento group included other sources of information, and being too lazy to go to a public library:

- ♦ "Public library as it is now is being passed by. It's a new age. Information age passing library by. Easier to use home computer, use the web, or access from school. Schools have to keep up with the times."

Words used to describe a public library in this group were: old, stodgy, dusty, not up-to-date, and no atmosphere. Several comments were made about the complicated system for locating books; "people don't learn the (Dewey Decimal) system anymore." There were also several references to ambiance and atmosphere: "I can read at the bookstore for hours, like the comfort (furniture) and Starbucks." One participant gave an example of a library with atmosphere: "The Seattle (Washington) library has lots of

windows with views of the city, high ceilings and a lounge. It's a landmark, a destination point where people go to meet and have fun."

When asked why they did not use the public library, participants in a second group in Sacramento (18-65 year olds) came up with the following reasons:

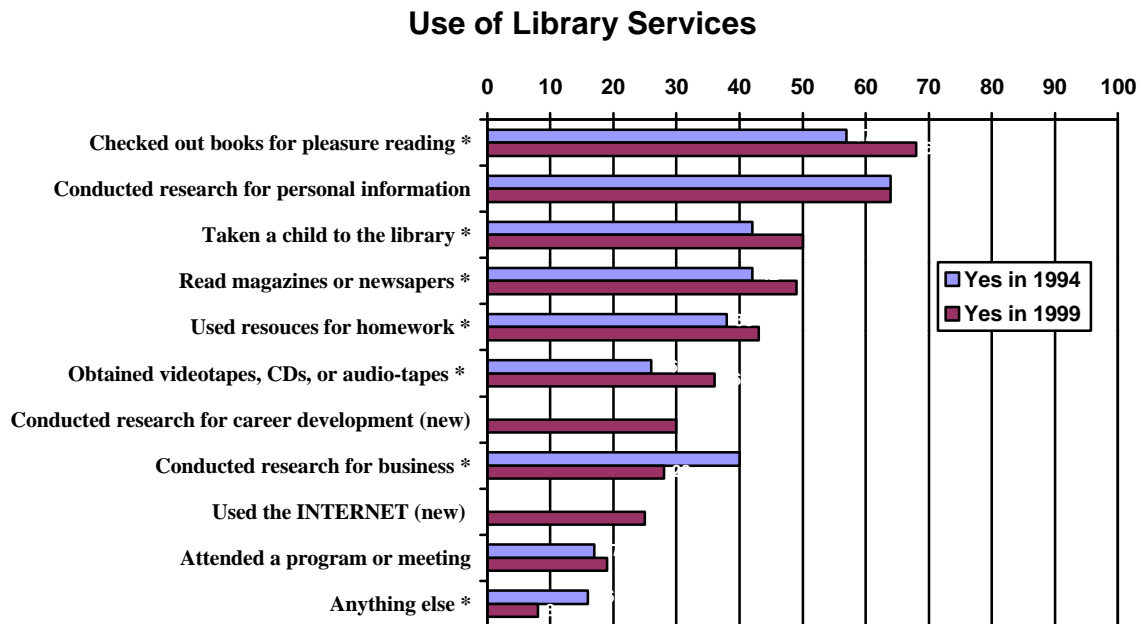
- ◆ "Don't have any reason to go, I read newspapers and watch TV at home."
- ◆ "Use the Internet at home and work. Don't have to drive or park."
- ◆ "I get books at Barnes & Noble and through the mail."
- ◆ "The library is intimidating and hard to use."
- ◆ "The hours aren't convenient."
- ◆ "It's too dull, not exciting or interesting."
- ◆ "There's no coffee."
- ◆ "There's not enough parking and it's too expensive downtown."
- ◆ The library is located in a less desirable neighborhood or area with transients and street people.
- ◆ "Did you know libraries have security guards? Kids in the library are disrespectful and noisy, they talk back to the librarians."
- ◆ "Libraries are not up-to-date."

Use of Library Services

11 ➤ Checking out books for pleasure reading and conducting research for personal information were the top two library services used during the past year (and also in 1994).

User respondents were asked which library services they had used in the last twelve months¹⁴. It can be seen in the graph below that approximately two-thirds of users checked out books for pleasure reading and conducted research for personal information: the most frequently-used services. Approximately half had taken a child to the library and read magazines or newspapers there. Thirty percent conducted research for career development at the library, and 25% indicated that they had used the Internet at the library. Less than 20% of respondents had attended a program or a meeting in the library – the least-used service.

¹⁴ The question about using services was asked only of users in 1999. It is assumed that it was asked of everyone in 1994, as no skip pattern was indicated. This may well account for the apparent decline in service use, as the inclusion of non-users would obviously boost the percentage of "no's".



Also shown in the graph are results from the 1994 California registered-voter survey¹⁵. (It can be seen that these services were also the two most used services in the 1994 study.) Statistically significant differences between the percentages of respondents answering “yes” in 1999 versus 1994 are indicated with an asterisk (*)¹⁶. Generally speaking, most of the services were used the same as, or more frequently in 1999 than in 1994. That is, significantly more respondents this year than five years ago checked out books, took a child to the library, read magazines or newspapers, used resources for homework, and obtained videotapes, CDs or audio-tapes. An exception to this trend was with the use of the public library for conducting research business – this use was significantly down in 1999 compared with 1994. However, it is possible that the new categories created this year accounted for the difference.

¹⁵ “California Library Services Survey”, Binder Poll, May 1994.

¹⁶ In order to do this, the percent of “undecided/don’t know” respondents were excluded from both years’ data. MetaResearch had access to only frequency questionnaire results from the 1994 study (instead of the raw results with actual numbers of respondents). The frequency results were percentages (whole numbers, no decimals) of respondents in each response category, including “undecided/don’t know” responses” but excluding refusal percentages. The actual number of respondents in each category therefore could only be roughly calculated; however, because refusal rates are generally quite low it is unlikely that results would be radically different. The percentages within each category were re-calculated; excluding “undecided/don’t know” responses. Tests of proportion were then conducted, using the estimated total numbers of respondents for each question in the 1994 data, and the actual numbers from the 1999 data.

IMPORTANCE OF LIBRARY SERVICES

- 12 ➤ Focus group participants ranked research for personal information and using resources for homework as the most important library services; obtaining videos and CD's, and reading newspapers and magazines were ranked as the least important services.

The focus group participants identified public library services and then used red dots to indicate the most important services and green dots for the least important services. Other comments related to public library services included:

- ♦ “I use the Internet when doing research for school, but if I need more information I go to the library for books.”
- ♦ When doing research for work use archived articles and microfilm.
- ♦ “My kids go to the library after school to study and for activities. It keeps them focused until I get home.”
- ♦ “I use manuals to learn to fix my car and save money. You don’t have to buy it (manual) to use once or twice.”
- ♦ “The library is the place for resources.”

When asked about literacy programs most participants in the Sacramento 18-65 year old group indicated that if it had been on the list they would have rated it number one in importance. Some members were not aware of the literacy program, but others were aware of tutoring for students. It was mentioned that it was important to advance yourself and that older people would be more comfortable learning at the library than at a school.

There was one participant that felt strongly about literacy programs not belonging in the library. “The public library is not here to replace schools. If kids can’t read it’s the responsibility of the parents and schools. Literacy shouldn’t be the number one priority of the library.” In response another participant listed reasons why libraries should offer literacy programs: “low-income neighborhoods need the service, children bussed to schools, due to cut-backs schools can no longer offer those services, many people learning English as a second language, older people need place to learn and older teens need help.” Another participant, an elementary school teacher, responded “when the school had to cut back on services the library was the first thing to go.” Another person mentioned that the schools no longer teach phonetics and that there are not enough textbooks for the students to take them home. “When I asked the teacher about getting books for my child

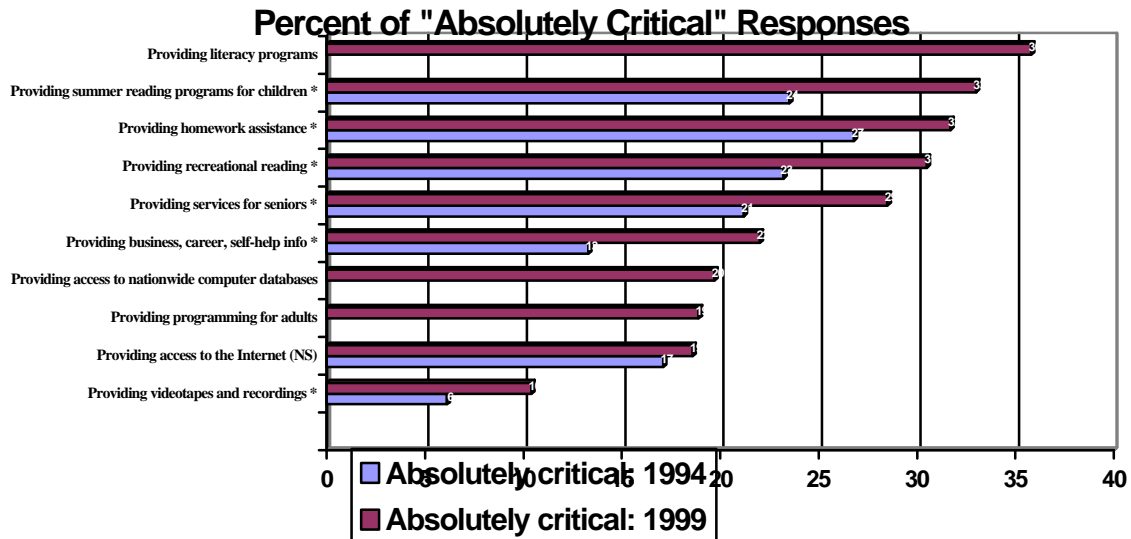
she said go to the library.”

In the Spanish focus group in Los Angeles, most participants said it was important for the library to employ bilingual personnel. They said that this makes them feel more comfortable and enables them to ask questions or assert their needs without any inhibitions. Most of the participants acknowledged that most libraries do have Spanish-speaking personnel. Most of the participants had visited the public library and usually with their children. Many indicated they used the library as a tool for maintaining ties to their culture and to assist them in teaching Spanish to their children. They expressed a desire to learn about computers and accessing the Internet. However, they also were concerned about their children being exposed to adult materials on the Internet, as the libraries did not appropriately supervise the children’s usage.

- 13 ➤ *The survey results generally supported the focus group findings in terms of the importance of certain library services. In addition, over a third of respondents felt it was “absolutely critical” that public libraries provide literacy programs. The majority of library services were rated as significantly more important now than five years ago.*

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of 10 different library services, using a 4-point scale. The graph below includes percentages of respondents rating the service as “absolutely critical.” It can be seen that the most important services included providing: literacy programs, summer reading programs for children, and homework assistance. The least important service was viewed to be providing videotapes and recordings for loan.

Some of these same services were also rated for importance in the 1994 California survey. The percentages of these respondents answering “absolutely critical” are also presented in the graph. All year-to-year comparisons but one (providing access to the Internet) were statistically significantly different, and are marked with an asterisk. In each case, the service was rated as being significantly more important in 1999 than it was rated five years ago.

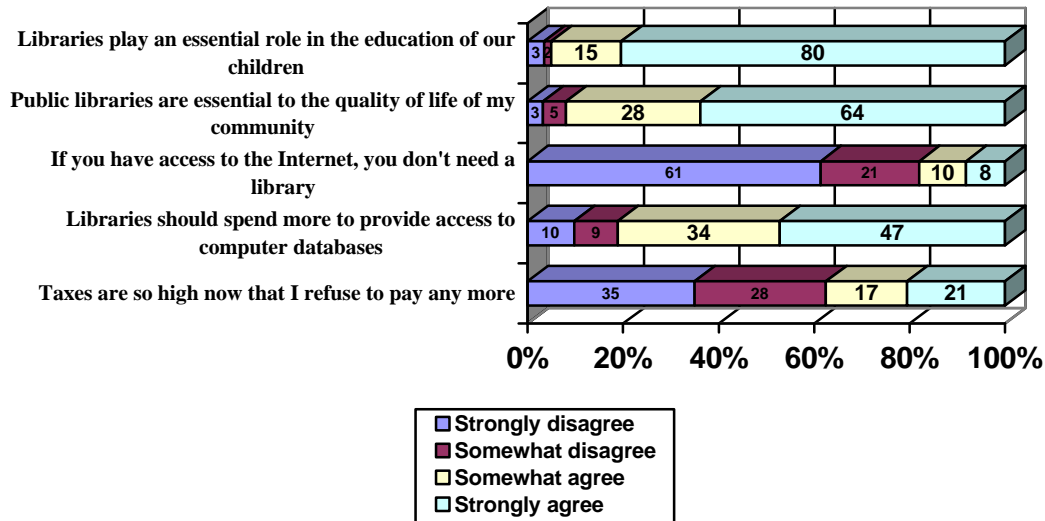


ATTITUDES TOWARDS PUBLIC LIBRARIES

- 14 ➤ *The vast majority of California respondents felt that public libraries play an essential role in the education of children and are essential to the quality of life of their community. The majority also felt that the Internet would not make libraries obsolete.*

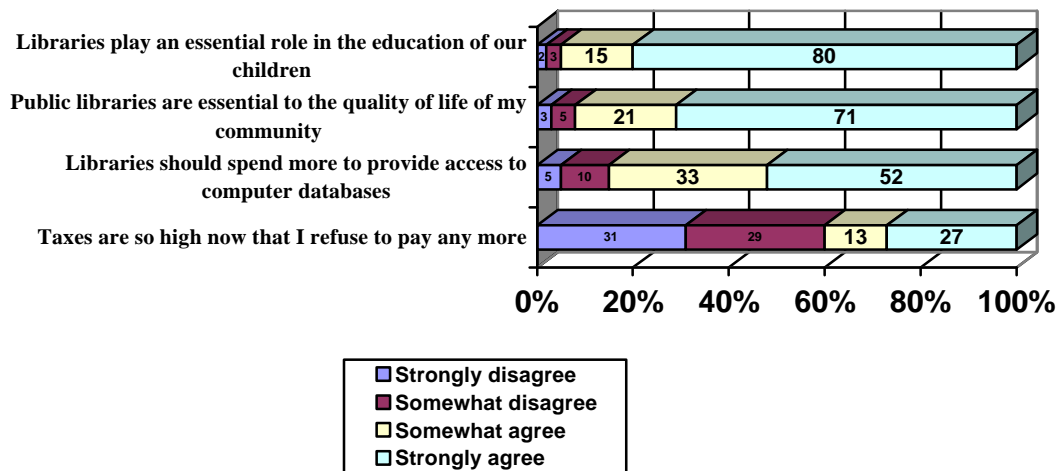
All respondents were asked to respond to a series of statements about the role of public libraries, using a 4-point strongly agree-strongly disagree scale. It can be seen from the graph below that the vast majority of California respondents (80%) “strongly agreed” that libraries play an essential role in the education of our children. Nearly two-thirds “strongly agreed” that libraries were essential to the quality of life of their community. Almost the same percentage “strongly disagreed” with the statement that if you have access to the Internet, you don’t need a library.

1999: Attitudes towards Public Libraries



Four of these statements were also asked of California voters in 1994, and those results are presented in the graph below. There were no statistically significant differences between the years – the same percentages of California respondents in 1994 as in 1999 agreed that libraries played essential roles.

1994: Attitudes towards Public Libraries



COMPARISONS WITH OTHER DEPARTMENTS AND SERVICES

15 ➤ *The vast majority of respondents rated their fire departments*

positively (combined ratings of “good” and “excellent”), followed by public libraries and police departments.

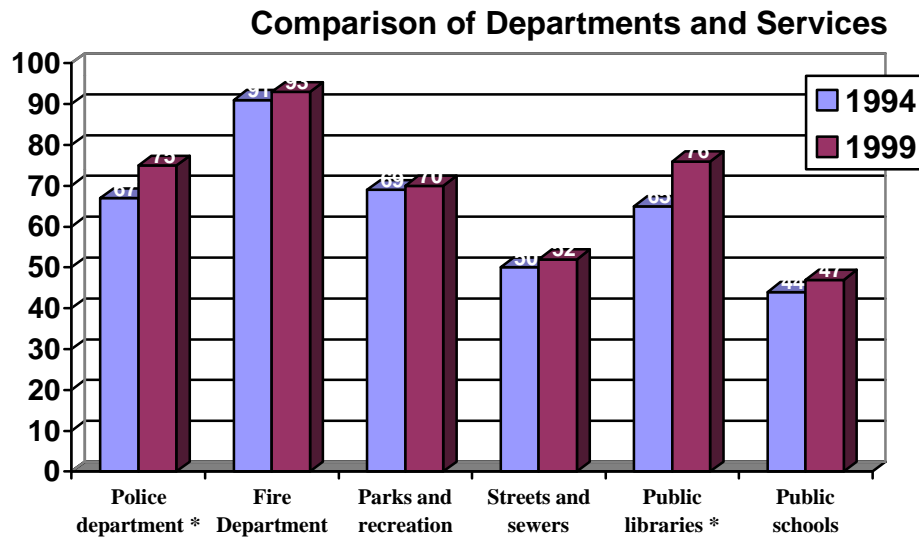
Respondents were asked to rate the quality of specific departments and services provided by local government. Results indicated that the vast majority of residents (93%) rated fire departments as “good” or “excellent”. Approximately three-quarters of respondents rated public libraries and police departments positively. Public schools were rated the lowest: less than half (47%) of respondents rated public schools as good or excellent.

16 ➤ *Positive ratings of public libraries and police departments increased significantly from 1994 to 1999.*

The questions asking respondents to rate specific departments and services provided by local government were also asked in 1994.¹⁷ Ratings of “excellent” plus “good” were combined to produce the percentages of positive ratings shown in the graph below¹⁸. Tests of proportion indicated that significantly more California residents rated police departments positively this year (75%) as compared with five years ago (67%). This was also true for public libraries: significantly more residents gave positive ratings this year (76%) than in 1994.

¹⁷ California Library Services Study, Binder Poll, May, 1994.

¹⁸ In order to test for statistical differences between the years, results were dichotomized into positive (ratings of “excellent” and “good”) and negative (ratings of “very poor”, “poor”, and “fair”), and the percent of “undecided/don’t know” respondents were excluded from both years’ data. As before, MetaResearch re-calculated the totals and percentages and conducted the tests of proportion using the estimated total numbers of respondents for each question in the 1994 data, and the actual numbers from the 1999 data. The two differences that did emerge were significant, even under the most conservative test.



Comparison with Bookstores

- 17 ➤ *Significantly more respondents went to a bookstore during the year than visited a public library.*

Respondents were asked how many times during the past year they had gone to a bookstore or accessed one online to browse or purchase books. Results indicated that 84% had gone to a bookstore at least once during the year, compared with 76% who had visited a public library. This difference was statistically significant. The table below lists the percentage of respondents within each of the separate answer categories:

| <i>During the past year, how many times have you...</i> | <i>Gone to a bookstore</i> | <i>Used or accessed a public library</i> |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| <i>Not at all</i> | 16% | 24% |
| <i>1-5 times</i> | 34% | 35% |
| <i>6-10 times</i> | 19% | 15% |
| <i>11-20 times</i> | 14% | 13% |
| <i>21 times or more</i> | 17% | 14% |

- 18 ➤ *More people are going to bookstores today than three years ago. Bookstores may pose more of a “threat” to public libraries than the Internet.*

The 1996 national survey also asked how many times respondents had gone to a bookstore during the year. Results indicated that 78% had made at least one visit. This is statistically significantly lower than the 84% of California residents who visited a bookstore in 1999.

Some of the discussions in the focus groups supported the idea that if public libraries were more like bookstores (comfortable chairs, coffee, and open more hours) they might attract more people. The young teen group in Redwood City (13 to 17 year olds), suggested as one of their public relations messages that the library should be a cool place with cool people, comfortable chairs and coffee – their idea of a “pickup place”. A second message was one that showed that it is free to get books from the library rather than buying them from Borders: “read for free.” This idea also emerged in the 18 to 25 year old group in Sacramento, where part of the discussion centered on the competition, which to these participants meant bookstores. A participant from another focus group said “have it like Barnes & Noble with a Starbucks where you can eat and read. I like the atmosphere.” Another said, “I get books at Barnes & Noble and through the mail.”

FUTURE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Focus Group Ideas

- 19 ➤ *Focus group participants felt that libraries will still be important in the future, but they will be more technologically advanced, and offer more convenience/better atmosphere for users.*

Participants in focus groups were asked to brainstorm ideas about how the public library would look in 5-10 years. The Sacramento 18-25 year old group proposed:

- ♦ Buildings housing public libraries would be more appealing aesthetically and would have atmosphere.
- ♦ There would be more libraries in populated (residential) areas. More libraries in convenient locations and open longer hours.
- ♦ Most libraries would be small branches with archival references, but most information would be retrieved via the Internet.
- ♦ Libraries would be virtual with few actual buildings.

- ♦ Books would be on CD Rom and information could be downloaded onto disks.
- ♦ Public libraries would be compartmentalized with sections for old books and technology. There would be “kids rooms where they can watch videos and play.”
- ♦ Books would be listed by topic, “like in school libraries.”
- ♦ There would be nothing in the library but computers. Libraries would have more computers, printers and Internet access available. Public libraries will offer classes on using technology since access will be more difficult for those without that knowledge.
- ♦ The main focus of future public libraries would be on children. “Teaching them to read and learn about the world.”
- ♦ Literacy would be more of a problem because of technology where icons rather than words were used. People wouldn’t need to learn to read to use the computer. Literacy would “still be the role of the library.”
- ♦ Most of the participants felt that there would be more staff and that staff would be knowledgeable about technology and books. They also felt that the staff would be higher paid because of their expertise. The staff would be younger and more service oriented. It was also recommended that public libraries target the age group most apt to use the library and gear the staff to match.

When asked what would be happening in the future libraries they had described, they indicated that more people would be going to the library to meet and attend lectures on culture and hobbies. There would be technology updates, classes on how to use the library and “a wing without books where people could meet and converse.”

The Spanish group in Los Angeles (18-65 year olds) felt that the library of the future would feature:

- ♦ Up-to-date information via the Internet
- ♦ Books replaced by computers
- ♦ Building that were modern and technologically-oriented
- ♦ Coffee shops and restaurants that make it a social environment
- ♦ Flexible hours of operation
- ♦ Access via both phone and computer 24 hours a day
- ♦ Meetings about public concerns like drug prevention and sexually transmitted diseases
- ♦ A strong focus on children’s education programs (i.e., storytelling, teaching music and sports)
- ♦ Classes on English as a second language
- ♦ Classes on foreign languages
- ♦ Classes on child development and enhancing self-esteem and communication skills
- ♦ Active participation in literacy programs

Another group (18-65 year olds) offered the following ideas:

- ♦ “You order your book in advance by phone or Internet and then use the drive-through to pick it up.”
- ♦ “A 24-hour operation.”

- ♦ “You will be able to download books onto disks and take home.”
- ♦ Audio books
- ♦ “You’ll be able to download information (books) from home through the modem. They will have a smaller building because they won’t need as much space. People would still come to the library if they don’t have a computer.”
- ♦ “There will be touch screens to show where book is located.”
- ♦ “It will be less personal with no books.”
- ♦ “There will be more comfortable seating, coffee and child care.”
- ♦ There will be different shelving for handicapped or short people, something that rotates or something accessible so don’t have to ask for help.”
- ♦ “It will be entertaining to draw them in as well as have peace and quiet. There will be different areas in the library for different things.”
- ♦ “There will be more computers.”
- ♦ “There will be a 24-hour call center.”
- ♦ “Cooking demonstrations.”
- ♦ “We’re stretching to make the library more than it should or needs to be.”

Most of the participants in this group felt strongly that the public needs to be informed about what events are happening at the public library. “They need to get the word out.” Things like storytelling, multicultural events and computer literacy/training should be advertised.

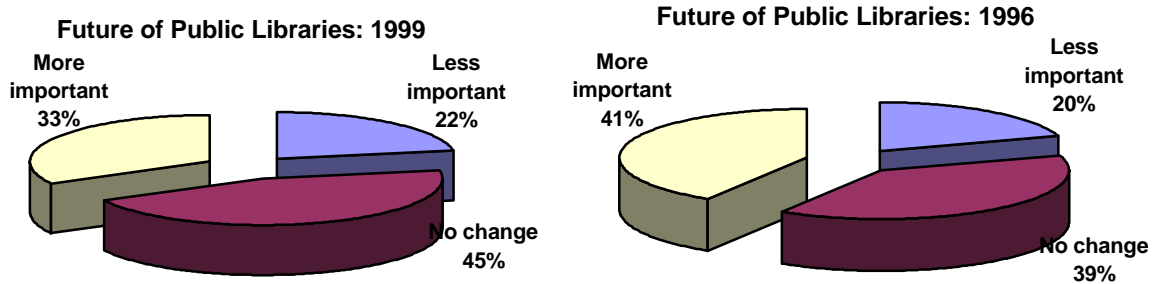
When asked about literacy in the future most participants indicated that libraries would still be offering the program. They felt that tutoring for students and learning English as a second language will continue to be needed services. Technology in the future prompted some positive responses: “more people will have technology and it will be easier to access,” and “you can access libraries worldwide, not just locally.” There were also some negatives related to technology: “there will be less books on the shelves (this person liked using books),” “there will still be people who don’t have access to technology,” and “prevalent and easier does not necessarily mean better (technology).”

Survey Results: Future Importance of Libraries

- 20 ➤ *Approximately one-third of respondents felt that public libraries would become more important in the future.*

Survey respondents were asked the question: “As more and more information becomes available through computers, some people say that public libraries will change. Thinking about the future, as the

use of computers continues to grow, do you think public libraries will become more important than they are now, less important, or that their importance will not change?” Results indicated that 33% of respondents felt libraries would become more important, 45% felt there would be no change, and 22% felt they would become less important. Results are presented graphically below, along with results from the 1996 national survey.



- 21 ➤ *Less than a quarter of respondents in both 1996 and the present felt that libraries would become “less important” in the future. However, there were significant differences between the years in terms of the “no change” and “more important” categories.*

Statistical tests of proportion¹⁹ indicated no significant differences between 1996 and 1999 results (presented in the graphs above) in terms of the percent of respondents who felt libraries would become “less important.” However, significantly more respondents felt libraries would become “more important” in 1996 (41%) than in 1999 (33%). This is because the percentage of current respondents who felt there would be “no change” was higher this year (45%) than three years ago (39%).

- 22 ➤ *The perceived role of the library in the future has changed from 1996 to the present: fewer people today than in the past think the most important role of the library will be a place where people can use computers and online services. Current residents see the most*

¹⁹ Percentage results were re-calculated excluding “undecided/don’t know” responses and estimated totals were used in the tests of proportion for the 1996 results.

important role for libraries as a place to read and borrow books.

Respondents in both the 1996 national study and the current study were also asked to choose from three role options the one they felt would be most important for public libraries in the future. Results are presented in the table below. Statistical tests of proportion indicated significant differences between 1996 and 1999 results in terms of responses to each of the three options (indicated with *).

| <i>As you think about the future, as the use of computers continues to grow, which of the following do you think will be <u>most</u> important for public libraries:</i> | <i>Percent of Respondents in 1999</i> | <i>Percent of Respondents in 1996</i> |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <i>1. to be a place where people can read books, and borrow books and other material *</i> | 49% | 36% |
| <i>2. to be a place where people can use computers to find information and to use online computer services *</i> | 20% | 38% |
| <i>3. to be a place that provides community or cultural information and activities *</i> | 16% | 10% |
| <i>All (not read)</i> | 15% | 15% |
| <i>None (not read)</i> | <1% | 1% |

It can be seen that the largest shift in perceptions was in terms of the importance of the library of the future being a place where people can use computers and online services. In 1996 this was the vision of the future at a national level. In 1999 it appears that more California residents see a more traditional role for the library (reading and borrowing) even in the future, perhaps due to the proliferation of home computers. However, this does not mean that they do not think having computers in libraries is unimportant, as other results from this survey indicated that library users were also accessing the Internet at public libraries, – they just don't see the technology role as being the most important role for public libraries.

Allocating Spending Dollars

- 23 ➤ *The majority of residents (over 70%) felt that it was “very important” for the public library in their community to spend money on:*

- 1. providing reading hours and other programs for*

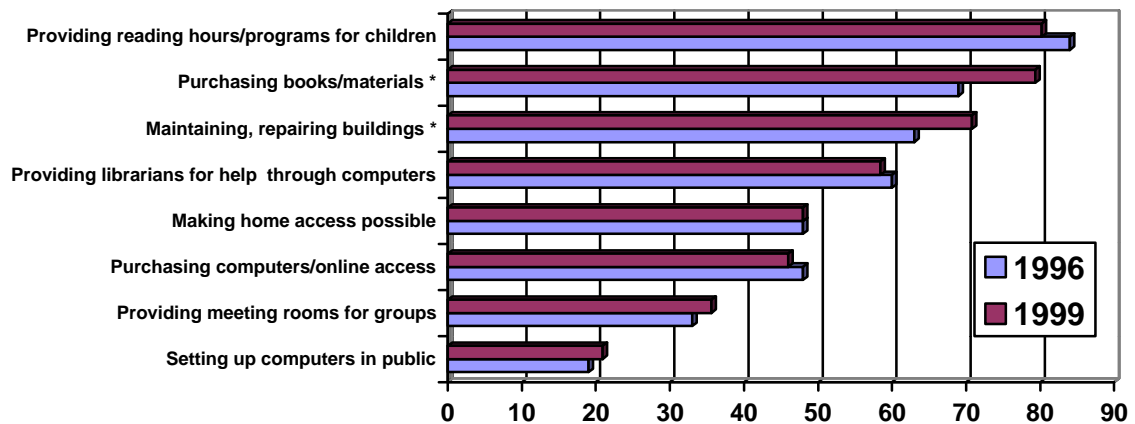
- children,*
- 2. purchasing new books and other materials, and*
 - 3. maintaining, repairing, and building public library buildings*

Respondents were read a list of ways that public libraries spend money and were asked to rate how important each one should be for the public library in their community, using a 4-point scale. Results indicated that approximately 80% of respondents felt it was “very important” to provide reading hours and other programs for children and to purchase books and other materials. Seventy-one percent felt that spending money to maintain, repair and build library buildings was also “very important”. Nearly 60% felt that providing a place where librarians help people find information through computers and online services was “very important”. The table below the next bullet indicates the percentage of respondents answering “very important” to these and the other ways of spending money.

- 24 ➤ *Although the above-mentioned points also emerged as the top three important areas for spending in the 1996 survey, there was significantly more support for spending on books and building maintenance this year than in 1996.*

Tests of proportion between the percentage of respondents answering “very important” to ways for libraries to spend money in 1996 versus 1999 were conducted. Results indicated two significant differences: significantly more respondents in 1999 than in 1996 said that it was “very important” that the public library in their community spend money on purchasing new materials and maintaining and repairing the buildings. In 1996 the level of support for purchasing new books and materials was 69%. This year the level was 79%. Support for spending on maintenance increased from 63% in 1996 to 71% this year. Results are presented in the table below (significant differences are indicated with a *).

Percentage responding "Very Important" to Spending Questions



ACCESS TO THE INTERNET

- 25 ➤ *The vast majority of respondents said they personally had access to the Internet – either in a public library, at home, at work, at school or at an Internet café.*

Respondents were asked if they personally had access to the Internet. Eighty-four percent indicated that they had Internet access – one way or another, through any of the five locations presented to them. It appears that a lot of public libraries in California are wired to the Internet as nearly 60% of respondents said they had access in a public library. Over half of the respondents had access at home. The table below lists the percentage responding “yes” to each of the location questions.

| <i>Do you personally have access to the Internet...</i> | <i>Percent responding “yes”</i> |
|--|--|
| <i>In a public library</i> | 59% |
| <i>At home</i> | 55% |
| <i>At work</i> | 42% |
| <i>At school</i> | 31% |
| <i>At an Internet cafe</i> | 14% |

Respondents mainly use the Internet for obtaining information and for e-mail.

PROFILE OF LIBRARY USERS VERSUS NON-USERS

- 26 ➤ *Library users were significantly more likely than non-users: to have a university degree, to be working, to have children under 18 living in the household, to be between the ages of 30 to 50 years and to have access to the Internet. There were significantly more non-users in the Central Valley than users.*

The differences mentioned above were the significant ones to emerge from a series of chi-square analyses which were conducted on the on the demographic characteristics of users and non-users (users were defined as respondents who had visited a public library at least once during the last twelve months). (Results are presented in the crosstabulation tables contained in the results binder.) It was also found that significantly more African American and Asian respondents were users than non-users of public libraries (no differences were found between users and non-users in the Caucasian or Hispanic groups).

- 27 ➤ *The three most important characteristics which differentiated users from non-users were: having access to the Internet, age, and education.*

In order to see which characteristics might be more “important” in terms of being able to profile users versus non-users (useful information for developing a public relations campaign), a stepwise multiple logistic regression analysis was run. The demographic characteristics, access to the Internet, and the overall impression questions were run in a model that tried to differentiate users from non-users. Results indicated that the most important characteristics differentiating library users from non-users were: having access to the Internet, age, and education. Library users had Internet access, were younger²⁰, and had more education than non-users. It is interesting to note that, contrary to viewing the Internet as a threat to public libraries, it appears that having access to the Internet actually helps define the user population. Libraries should continue to offer Internet access – this may help attract current non-users.

²⁰ As the telephone survey was conducted only with adults over the age of 17, “younger” here does not refer children, but rather the relative ages of the adult respondents. It should be noted that among the group of teenagers who participated in the focus group in Redwood City that nearly all had not visited a public library in the past year. (However, they did use their school libraries.)

PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN SUGGESTIONS

- 28 ➤ *Focus group participants offered suggestions for public relations campaigns. These ideas included targeting teens and promoting access to technology. Many “slogans” were suggested.*

The focus group participants were asked to imagine that they were in charge of a public relations campaign to promote the use of public libraries. They were to design three messages that would encourage people to use the public library. After breaking into small groups of 2 or 3 they had presented their ideas to the whole group and then selected the three messages they felt were the best.

A few of the suggestions included:²¹.

- ♦ Have a ‘real’ author (“not some celebrity that has a book out written by someone else”) at the library to talk about their book and sign books. Give away a free book and donuts.
- ♦ Have a glitzy PR campaign with advertising focused on competition (bookstores). Include in the message that it costs money to get books from a bookstore and that it is free from the library. Use celebrities like athletes and musicians as spokespersons and target the messages at teens.
- ♦ Free programs for children and adults. “Get them to come to the program even if you have to pay them (door prize). They may not come if you don’t sell them on the programs being beneficial and will enhance their lives.”
- ♦ “Not only do you learn, it’s free.”
- ♦ “Come to the library and see how we have changed for you.”
- ♦ “Check us out, we’re keeping up with technology.”
- ♦ La biblioteca es un lugar público y en el nuevo milenio Ud. encontrará toda clase de información, que Ud. necesite. (The library is a public place in the new millennium, you will be able to find all kinds of information you need.)
- ♦ En la biblioteca tenemos computadoras. Son las puertas de mañana. (In the libraries, we have computers. They are the doors that will open your future.)

²¹ The “Focus Group Summary Report” contained in the results binder includes all suggestions.

In summary, in Sacramento, one group recommended having authors as speakers at the library and focusing the campaign on the competition, which they identified as bookstores. The other group chose 24-hour service and guaranteed book availability for their campaign. Both groups selected free library programs as another item to be included in a public relations campaign.

In Redwood City, The public relations campaign brainstorming session for group 1 focused on appealing to teens like themselves by showing that the public library was a place to go for fun, meet other teens and that the books were free. Group 2 wanted to target senior citizens by offering free classes including the using the technology at the library.

For the Los Angeles group, the messages that were developed for the public relations campaign were directed at finding information and self-improvement. Technology was seen as one of the keys to achieving self-improvement.

Summary Conclusions

- ✓ California respondents have positive perceptions of public libraries, and see them as essential to their communities as well as contributing to the education of their children. They support having libraries spend money to provide reading hours and other programs for children, to purchase new books and materials, and to maintain and repair library buildings.
- ✓ Respondents also have positive opinions of librarians and library staff in general. They support spending money to provide a place where librarians can help people find information through computers and online services. They also want libraries to have adequate staff to supervise children and offer a safe place to go.
- ✓ Approximately three-in-four residents accessed a public library during the past year. The median number of visits among users was 6 times during the year.
- ✓ Respondents felt there was no need to go to the library more frequently. They also cited being too busy, and the hours of the library not being convenient as reasons for not going more often.
- ✓ Checking out books for pleasure reading and conducting research for personal information were the top two library services used during the past year (and also in 1994).
- ✓ Offering literacy classes is a necessary service and will continue to be a role of the public library.
- ✓ The Internet was not seen as the main threat to the survival of public libraries. In fact, library users were more likely to have access to the Internet than non-users, and also to use public libraries for accessing the Internet. Only 6% of users said they used the Internet instead of visiting a library. Focus group participants suggested technology must be a service of the public library system. Up-to-date services and books were key to participants considering visiting public libraries.
- ✓ Bookstores are viewed as the main competitors of public libraries, and more respondents went to a bookstore this year than visited a public library. Focus group participants want public libraries to have an atmosphere like a bookstore with coffee, food and comfortable furniture. It should be a fun place to go.
- ✓ These conclusions are based on a study that included 5 focus group discussions and 1,017 telephone interviews with a representative sample of California residents.